

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, Hawaii

August 31, 2016

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, welcome to Hawaii. *[Laughter]* It's a——

Audience members. Aloha!

The President. Aloha! *[Laughter]* You know, it's not often I get to welcome folks to my home State. But it's always wonderful to be here, even if it's only for a day. It's even rarer that not one but two hurricanes are set to pass through the islands over the next few days. *[Laughter]* So we've been working with the Governor and FEMA to make sure Hawaii's got everything it needs to keep our folks safe. And in the meantime, I'd just ask the people of Hawaii to listen to your State and local officials, and make sure you and your families are prepared for the storms. But the Governor says he's got it all taken care of. He's pushing them all south. And—*[laughter]*.

I want to thank East-West Center President Charles Morrison for hosting all of us this evening. I want to recognize, in addition to the Governor, we also have Senator Brian Schultz—Schatz here. Where is Brian? There he is. I want to thank the 8,000 delegates from more than 180 countries who will share their expertise here at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, including President Zhang Xinsheng and Director General Andersen. To the world leaders and ministers who are here from the Pacific Island Conference of Leaders, thank you for joining us tonight. And I know many of you will be in Washington next month when Secretary Kerry hosts our 2016 Our Oceans Conference.

But today the United States is proud to host the IUCN Congress for the first time. I just came here from another beautiful place: Lake Tahoe, Nevada. And in my address there, I talked about climate change and conservation and how those two things are inextricably linked. Few people understand, I think, the stakes better than our Pacific Island leaders because they're seeing already the impact. Rising temperatures and sea levels pose an existential threat to your countries. And while some Members of the U.S. Congress still seem to be debating whether climate change is real or not, many of you are already planning for new places for your people to live. Crops are withering in the Marshall Islands. Kiribati bought land in another country because theirs may someday be submerged. High seas forced villagers from their homes in Fiji.

And no nation, not even one as powerful as the United States, is immune from a changing climate. I saw it myself last year in our northernmost State of Alaska, where the sea is already swallowing villages and eating away at shorelines; where the permafrost thaws and the tundra is burning; where glaciers are melting at a pace unprecedented in modern times. And it was a preview of our future if the climate keeps changing faster than our efforts to address it.

And that's why I've devoted so much of my time and my energy to making sure that we get this right while we still have time. I spoke about this at length in a speech earlier today, but over the past 7½ years, America has worked to generate more clean energy, use less dirty energy, and waste less energy overall. And it's made a difference. Our investments have tripled wind power, multiplied solar power thirtyfold, and in many places, helped clean energy

become cheaper than dirty energy. And we did all of this while fueling the longest uninterrupted streak of job growth on record.

So there's no conflict between a healthy economy and a healthy planet. And that's why I've committed, along with Canada and Mexico, to get 50 percent of U.S. electricity from clean sources by 2025. And with many of our biggest businesses switching to clean energy, I'm absolutely confident that we can meet that goal.

But that's not all. I've also made sure we're better prepared for the impacts of climate change, because even as we need to hit the brakes so that we don't go over the cliff, we're not going to come to an immediate stop. We know that there is still going to be an inevitable impact as a consequence of rising temperatures. And that means conservation has been a cornerstone of my Presidency.

Since taking office, I've protected more than 548 million acres of our lands and waters for our children and our grandchildren. I have to say that Teddy Roosevelt gets the credit for starting the National Parks system, but when you include a big chunk of the Pacific Ocean, we now have actually done more acreage—[laughter]—than any other President. We've designated national monuments from Maine to Ohio to California. And just last week, thanks to the hard work of many people in this room, including Senator Schatz, I created the world's largest marine preserve, quadrupling the size of our monument at Papahānaumokuākea. This is an area twice the size of Texas that's going to be protected, and it allows us to save and study the fragile ecosystem threatened by climate change.

Tomorrow I'm going to travel to the Midway Atoll to see it for myself. Seven thousand species live in its waters, a quarter of which are not found anywhere else in the world. Ancient islanders believed it contained the boundary between this life and the next. Hundreds of brave Americans gave their lives there in defense of the world's freedom. So this is a hallowed site, and it deserves to be treated that way. And from now on, it will be preserved for future generations.

So I'm very proud of these achievements, but we always have to remind ourselves no nation can do this alone. We're going to have to tackle climate change together. Nations like many of yours obviously feel a special urgency about this. The biggest emitters, like my country and China, have a special responsibility to act to make sure that countries willing to do their part move past the dirty phase of development to move into a clean energy strategy. That was a key principle in the Paris Agreement. And I was mentioning to the leaders here, we could not have gotten a Paris Agreement without the incredible efforts and hard work of the island nations. They made an enormous difference, and we're very proud of the work that they did.

And this is why we've been working to accelerate public-private clean energy innovation, making sure that resources will be there for countries that need help preparing for the impacts of climate change that we can no longer avoid. It's also why tonight I can announce more than \$30 million in new commitments for our friends in the Pacific: funding for investments like stronger infrastructure, more sustainable development, and safer drinking water. So—[applause].

From here I'm going to be traveling to China, where we'll be meeting for the G-20 summit, and climate will be a centerpiece of our agenda. Joint U.S.-Chinese leadership on climate was part of the reason that we were able to get Paris done, and I'm going to push to build on that record as long as I occupy this office and probably even after I leave it.

There's an old Hawaiian proverb that loosely translates to "Unite to move forward." It seems simple enough, but the natives used it as a reminder that if you want to row a canoe, every oar has to be moving in unison; otherwise, I don't know, you go in circles. [Laughter] You just go around and around. Your pace slows. You drift. You get caught up in the currents, and you get off course.

Well, when it comes to climate change, there is a dire possibility of us getting off course, and we can't allow that to happen. That's why our united efforts are so important. Government has a role to play but so do scientists and inventors and investors, all working to revolutionize clean energy production. Entrepreneurs and academics and leaders in this room are collaborating across continents. And everyday citizens of the world are going to have to push their own communities to adopt smarter practices and to push those of us in positions of power to be less concerned with special interests and more concerned about the judgment of future generations.

And that's why we're all here. That's what this is all about. And for me, this is especially meaningful. I was telling my staff, a lot of my life started about a mile radius around here. [Laughter] My mother and father met probably a couple hundred yards from here. [Laughter] It's true. I went to school about a mile from here. I was actually born about a mile from here. [Laughter] My grandmother and my grandparents lived most of their lives a short way away from here.

And so since Malia was born, since my oldest child was born, I've brought them here every Christmas for the last 18 years now. And I want to make sure that when they're bringing their children here or their grandchildren here, that they are able to appreciate the wonders and the beauty of this island and of the Pacific and every island.

So I know you have the same feeling, and that's why we've got to unite to move forward. We have to row as one. If we do, we might just save the one planet that we've got.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:37 p.m. in the Conference Hall at the East-West Center. In his remarks, he referred to Governor David Y. Ige of Hawaii. He also referred to Proclamation 9478, signed August 25, which expanded the existing Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : International Union for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, HI.

Locations: Honolulu, HI.

Names: Anderson, Inger; Ige, David Y.; Kerry, John F.; Morrison, Charles E.; Obama, Malia; Schatz, Brian; Zhang Xincheng.

Subjects: Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Conservation of Nature, International Union for the, World Conservation Congress; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Conservation :: Promotion efforts; Environment : Conservation :: Public lands, protection efforts; Environment : Paris Agreement; Hawaii : Governor; Hawaii : International Union for the Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress in Honolulu; Hawaii : President's visits; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Interior, Department of the : Papahānaumokuākea Marine

National Monument, expansion; Interior, Department of the : Park Service, National; Midway Atoll, U.S.; Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, expansion; State, Department of : Secretary.

DCPD Number: DCPD201600547.